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ABSTRACT

This publication sets forward the California State Postsecondary Education Commission's historical and present perspective on educational equity in California higher education and was prompted by Governor Wilson's June 1, 1995 Executive Order to End Preferential Treatment and to Promote Individual Opportunity Based on Merit (Executive Order W-124-95). The statement draws on the Master Plan for Higher Education, the California Education Code, and the Commission's adopted policies and recommendations on educational equity. The Commission believes that educational equity is vital to the state's economic and social future and that the focus of attention ought to be on the preparation of students for college, particularly for meeting eligibility requirements for California State University and the University of California institutions. The Commission notes that it has long supported effective collaborative student preparation programs whose goals are to enhance the number of students who are admissible from groups whose historical rates of eligibility for California's public universities have been low. Additionally, this perspective stresses the importance of developing campus environments that are supportive for all students. The Commission reiterates its opposition to any practice that involves quotas, the predominance in the admissions process of any one factor other than eligibility, the lowering of academic standards, or the enrollment of ineligible students through other than limited special action efforts. (Author/JB)

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ED 384 291

PERSPECTIVE OF THE CALIFORNIA POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION COMMISSION ON EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

CALIFORNIA POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION COMMISSION

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JUNE 1995 COMMISSION REPORT 95-8

Summary

This document provides the Postsecondary Education Commission's historical and present perspective on educational equity in California higher education -- a perspective which draws upon the Master Plan for Higher Education, the California Education Code, and the Commission's adopted policies and recommendations on educational equity.

The Commission decided to summarize its perspective to assist the leadership of the State's higher education institutions in responding to the Governor's Executive Order to End Preferential Treatment and to Promote Individual Opportunity Based on Merit (W-124-95), issued on June 1, 1995. Because the Governor vests the responsibility for responding to this order with the governing boards and executives of higher education, the Commission believes that, as the coordinating agency that advises the Governor and Legislature on higher education policy, its perspective on this issue should be beneficial to higher education's leadership as they consider their response to the Executive Order.

The Commission's perspective emerges from its belief that educational equity is vital to California's economic and social future. To that end, the Commission stipulates that the focus of attention ought to be on the preparation of students for college, particularly on taking and performing well in the specific courses that are required in order to be eligible for admissions to the California State University and the University of California. The Commission has long supported effective collaborative student preparation programs whose goal is to enhance the number of students who are admissible from groups whose historical rates of eligibility for California's public universities have been low. Additionally, this perspective discusses the importance of developing campus environments that are supportive for all students.

Finally, the Commission reiterates its opposition to any practice that involves quotas, the predominance in the admissions process of any one factor other than eligibility, the lowering of academic standards, or the enrollment of ineligible students through other than limited special action efforts.

At its August meeting, the Commission will discuss a report on the historical and current policies, programs, and practices in California higher education to achieve statewide educational equity goals. The Commission expects that this paper and the one that it will consider in August will contribute to greater understanding on this critical, but controversial, topic currently being debated at the national and state levels. Moreover, the Commission intends that these reports will support the self-reflection currently underway about educational equity in California higher education.

The Commission accepted this paper at its meeting on June 5, 1995. To order copies of this report, write to the Commission at 1303 J Street, Suite 500, Sacramento, California 95814-2838; or telephone (916) 445-7933.

PERSPECTIVE OF THE CALIFORNIA POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION COMMISSION ON EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

CALIFORNIA POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION COMMISSION
1303 J Street • Suite 500 • Sacramento, California 95814-2938

COMMISSION REPORT 95-8
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PERSPECTIVE OF THE CALIFORNIA POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION COMMISSION ON EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

NATIONALLY and especially in California during the last six months, "affirmative action" has been the subject of a major policy and political debate. To date, the historical reasons and underlying premises, goals, need, legality, fairness, and effectiveness of "affirmative action" have been the focus of the debate -- a debate that has become increasingly polarized, emotional, personal, accusatory, and anecdotal rather than factual.

The Governor's Executive Order

In moving from debate to action, Governor Wilson issued an Executive Order to End Preferential Treatment and to Promote Individual Opportunity Based on Merit (Executive Order W-124-95) on June 1, along with two open letters to the people of California explaining his reasons for taking this action. The Executive Order calls for specific actions in State government:

- It shall not discriminate in employment decisions on the basis of race, gender, creed, color, religion, national or ethnic origin, age, marital status, or physical or mental disability;
- It shall take appropriate measures to ensure equal opportunity in employment by hiring qualified applicants from all segments of the work force and shall monitor its hiring practices to ensure that they are nondiscriminatory;
- Its decisions in public employment and contracting shall be based on merit;
- It shall eliminate all preferential treatment requirements that exceed federal or state statutory or regulatory requirements;
- It shall eliminate consultant contracts, advisory committees, and performance recognition awards that encourage preferential treatment;
- It shall modify the manner by which state employment goals and timetables are established by recomputing employment pools based upon specific job classifications rather than the general work force;
- It shall eliminate, except to the extent compelled by law, employment practices that grant preferential treatment based on race or gender; and,
- Educational agencies, including the State Board of Education, the California Community Colleges, the California State University, and the University of California as well as all other branches of State government are requested to comply with the intent and requirements in this executive order.

This executive order vests the responsibility for its compliance with the governing boards and executives of the educational systems. Because the Commission is the coordinating agency that advises the Governor and Legislature on higher education policy, its perspective on educational equity should be beneficial to higher education's leadership as our public systems consider their response to this executive order.

The Commission's perspective

Educational equity -- a goal specified in the Master Plan and Donahoe Act

1. The Commission's perspective on educational equity flows directly from the Master Plan for Higher Education, as specified in the Donohoe Act, which states that the public and independent educational systems share three goals that are designed to provide educational opportunity and success for the broadest possible range of citizens. Those goals are:

   - access to education and the opportunity for success for all qualified Californians;
   - quality instruction and excellent programs for all students; and
   - "educational equity not only through a diverse and representative student body and faculty but also through educational environments in which each person, regardless of race, gender, age, disability, or economic circumstances, has a reasonable chance to fully develop his or her potential" (Education Code 66010.2).

   The Commission's policy statement on educational equity, revised in June of 1994, states: "The Commission envisions a California of tomorrow as one in which all Californians have an expanded opportunity to develop their talents and skills to the fullest, for both individual and collective benefit. This vision is one in which the characteristics of Californians -- ethnicity, race, language, socioeconomic status, gender, home community, and disability -- do not determine educational accomplishments and achievements".

The importance of educational equity to the State's future

2. The Commission further stated in its policy declaration the reasons that it regards educational equity as a critical issue. The undeniable fact that our population is becoming more heterogeneous -- in myriad ways -- means that our educational system has no choice but to teach a student body that is increasingly diverse if California is to maintain its leadership role in the future -- a public interest that serves the State and its residents alike. In particular, economic growth, democratic participation, and social cohesion are the ultimate benefits that the society derives from education and they serve to justify the public's investment in it. For California, this is particularly true because:

   - Education provides the foundation by which Californians will achieve economic and social mobility and learn the skills and competencies by which they can contribute positively and productively to the society;

- California requires a strong economic base. The extent to which all Californians are educated and prepared to benefit from advanced training -- particularly in the scientific and technological areas which have been, and are expected to continue to be, the state's hallmark -- enhances the likelihood that California will continue its capacity to compete with other technologically sophisticated states and nations.
- California's representative government requires an educated and active electorate. Education provides the opportunity for all Californians to learn the participatory skills required to become actively involved in State and local decision-making and provide leadership for the State in the future.

Eligibility is the key to educational equity at the collegiate level

3. The Commission believes that the key to educational equity for all Californians is elementary and secondary school preparation for college. The 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education provided general direction to the State University and University with respect to admissions. The Plan called for the University to **select** first-time freshmen from the top 12.5 percent of the high school graduating class and the State University to **select** its freshmen from the top 33.3 percent. It, however, gave the systems authority to set specific requirements such that these guidelines were achieved. The two public university systems have established and modified their admissions requirements over the last thirty-five years in order to admit freshmen classes in line with the Master Plan's directive. Indeed, the State University and University have gone beyond the Master Plan by admitting **all eligible applicants** who meet the system's specific admissions requirements. The Commission continues to have a critical role to play in this regard because it periodically conducts statewide studies to determine the congruence between the systems' admissions requirements and the guidelines established by the Master Plan.

   The Commission has continued to stress that the historical and current challenge is that there are large differences in the proportion (or eligibility rates) of students from various racial-ethnic groups and geographic regions who are eligible for the State University and the University. This situation influences and complicates the extent to which these institutions can respond to the intent of the Legislature that they "pursuant to Section 66201.5, seek to enroll a student body that meets high academic standards and reflects the cultural, racial, geographic, economic, and social diversity of California" (Education Code 66205b). If educational opportunity and equity were a reality, one would expect similar eligibility rates across groups and each group's rate would approximate 12.5 percent and 33.3 percent for the University and State University, respectively. While the relationship between income and eligibility is less discernible from available information, income disparities certainly exist among racial-ethnic groups; the groups that have the higher eligibility rates have higher income levels.

   The Commission has continued to focus on the importance of eligibility for

achieving educational equity because it is the single overriding determinant of admissions to the State University and the University. Additionally, the Commission has stressed the fact that eligibility is a dichotomous measure -- a student is either eligible for admission or not -- and all those students who are eligible and have applied to the State University or the University have been offered a place at a campus in that system.

Effectiveness of collaborative student preparation programs

4. In order to address the challenges presented by the disparity in eligibility rates between groups, the Commission has been, and continues to be, a strong supporter of effective student preparation programs that involve collaboration between the schools and the public and independent higher education sectors. These programs are designed to enhance the eligibility for college of Black, Latino, Native American, rural, and low-income students -- students from groups whose eligibility rates have persistently been low.

   The Commission was directed by the Governor and Legislature in Supplemental Language to the 1988-89 Budget "to assess the impact of these programs and identify those programs and activities which are successful and recommend priorities for future state funding to improve student preparation". Over the following three years, the Commission examined nine collaborative student preparation programs that served over 72,000 seventh to twelfth graders in 1990 and, while they were focused on students from the specific groups listed above, their services were available to all students at the schools on a nondiscriminatory basis. The Commission concluded these programs were successful in significantly increasing the number of students who were eligible for the State University and the University. For example, 52.3 percent of the students in the Early Academic Outreach Program administered by the University of California were eligible to attend the University, a percentage far in excess of the overall statewide rate of 18.8 percent. Because of the success of these programs, the Commission recommended that they be expanded in terms of number of students, schools, and geographic areas served and in terms of their program components.

The importance of developing campus environments that are supportive for all students

5. In addition to its support of effective student preparation programs and its focus on eligibility as the linchpin of the admissions process, the Commission has stressed the importance of developing campus environments that are welcoming, supportive, and hospitable for all students. The Commission and the Master Plan for Higher Education both stipulate that simply enrolling a diverse student body is not sufficient for educational equity to exist, but rather that the governing boards should maintain "multicultural learning environments free from all forms of discrimination and harassment" (Education Code 66030b). Moreover, the Commission believes that diverse environments enrich the educational experiences of all students because they are taught about various cultures, they learn of the history and experiences of people from different backgrounds, and they have the

occasion to interact with a heterogeneous group of individuals. These opportunities should prepare graduates to participate productively in a pluralistic world, such as the California of today and especially of tomorrow in which the residents increasingly will be from diverse backgrounds. In addition, the Commission recommended that assessments of campus climates be conducted on a regular basis in order to assist campuses in identifying their strengths and weaknesses in developing these hospitable learning environments.

Further elements of the Commission's perspective on educational equity

6. Finally, the Commission believes that it is important to articulate its strong historic and current opposition to the following:

- quotas in the admissions process on any basis;
- the predominance of any one factor in the admissions process other than eligibility;
- the lowering of standards or requirements in order to assemble a diverse student body -- an action which would be counter to the Commission's notion that "educational equity is achieved when pluralism and excellence are equal partners in a quality educational environment"; and
- the admission of any student who is ineligible unless that student is admitted through special action under the prescribed criteria and within the guidelines established by the appropriate governing board.

Future Commission action

Finally, the Commission has long supported self-reflection on the part of educational institutions about their policies, programs, and practices. As a consequence, the examination that is currently underway by all three public higher education systems and that Governor Wilson calls for in his executive order is both appropriate and necessary, especially if its ultimate goal is to foster equitable opportunities for all students throughout their educational careers. The Commission plans to contribute by providing objective and factual information on policies, programs, and practices currently in place in California's colleges and universities and make recommendations, when appropriate, to achieve the aforementioned outcome. Commission staff expect that this report will be presented at the August meeting.

CALIFORNIA POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION COMMISSION

THE California Postsecondary Education Commission is a citizen board established in 1974 by the Legislature and Governor to coordinate the efforts of California's colleges and universities and to provide independent, non-partisan policy analysis and recommendations to the Governor and Legislature.

Members of the Commission

The Commission consists of 17 members. Nine represent the general public, with three each appointed for six-year terms by the Governor, the Senate Rules Committee, and the Speaker of the Assembly. Six others represent the major segments of postsecondary education in California. Two student members are appointed by the Governor.

As of June 1995, the Commissioners representing the general public are:

Henry Der, San Francisco; *Chair*
Guillermo Rodriguez, Jr., San Francisco; *Vice Chair*
Elaine Alquist, Santa Clara
Mim Andelson, Los Angeles
C. Thomas Dean, Long Beach
Jeffrey I. Marston, San Diego
Melinda G. Wilson, Torrance
Linda J. Wong, Los Angeles
Ellen F. Wright, Saratoga

Representatives of the segments are:

Roy T. Brophy, Fair Oaks; appointed by the Regents of the University of California;

Yvonne W. Larsen, San Diego; appointed by the California State Board of Education;

Alice Petrossian, Glendale; appointed by the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges;

Ted J. Saenger, San Francisco; appointed by the Trustees of the California State University;

Kyhl Smeby, Pasadena; appointed by the Governor to represent California's independent colleges and universities; and

Frank R. Martinez, San Luis Obispo; appointed by the Council for Private Postsecondary and Vocational Education.

The two student representatives are:
Stephen Lesher, Meadow Vista
Beverly A. Sandeen, Costa Mesa

Functions of the Commission

The Commission is charged by the Legislature and Governor to "assure the effective utilization of public postsecondary education resources, thereby eliminating waste and unnecessary duplication, and to promote diversity, innovation, and responsiveness to student and societal needs."

To this end, the Commission conducts independent reviews of matters affecting the 2,600 institutions of postsecondary education in California, including community colleges, four-year colleges, universities, and professional and occupational schools.

As an advisory body to the Legislature and Governor, the Commission does not govern or administer any institutions, nor does it approve, authorize, or accredit any of them. Instead, it performs its specific duties of planning, evaluation, and coordination by cooperating with other State agencies and non-governmental groups that perform those other governing, administrative, and assessment functions.

Operation of the Commission

The Commission holds regular meetings throughout the year at which it debates and takes action on staff studies and takes positions on proposed legislation affecting education beyond the high school in California. By law, its meetings are open to the public. Requests to speak at a meeting may be made by writing the Commission in advance or by submitting a request before the start of the meeting.

The Commission's day-to-day work is carried out by its staff in Sacramento, under the guidance of its executive director, Warren Halsey Fox, Ph.D., who is appointed by the Commission.

Further information about the Commission and its publications may be obtained from the Commission offices at 1303 J Street, Suite 500, Sacramento, California 98514-2938; telephone (916) 445-7933.

PERSPECTIVE OF THE CALIFORNIA POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION COMMISSION ON EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

Commission Report 95-8

ONE of a series of reports published by the California Postsecondary Education Commission as part of its planning and coordinating responsibilities. Single copies may be obtained without charge from the Commission at 1303 J Street, Suite 500, Sacramento, California 95814-2938. Recent reports include:

94-16 *State Postsecondary Review Entity (SPRE) Standards, as Submitted to the Office of Administrative Law and the United States Secretary of Education* (October 1994)

94-17 *Fiscal Profiles, 1994: The Fourth in a Series of Factbooks About the Financing of California Higher Education* (Ocober 1994)

94-18 *Proposed Construction of the Palmdale Center of the Antelope Valley Community College District: A Report to the Governor and Legislature in Response to a Request from the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges* (October 1994)

94-19 *The Performance of California Higher Education, 1994: The First Annual Report to California's Governor, Legislature, and Citizens in Response to Assembly Bill 1808 (Chapter 741, Statutes of 1991)* (December 1994)

1995

95-1 *A New State Policy on Community College Student Charges* (February 1995)

95-2 *The WICHE Compact: An Assessment of California's Continued Membership in the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education* (February 1995)

95-3 *The Challenge of the Century: Planning for Record Student Enrollment and Improved Outcomes in California Postsecondary Education* (April 1995)

95-4 *Faculty Salaries in California's Public Universities, 1995-96: A Report to the Legislature and the Governor in Response to Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 51* (April 1995)

95-5 *Legislative and State Budget Priorities of the Commission, 1995: A Report of the California Postsecondary Education Commission* (April 1995)

95-6 *Executive Compensation in California Public Higher Education, 1994-95: The Third in a Series of Annual Reports to the Governor and Legislature in Response to the 1992 Budget Act* (June 1995)

95-7 *Approval of the Escondido Center of the Palomar Community College District: A Report to the Governor and Legislature in Response to a Request from the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges* (June 1995)

95-8 *Perspective of the California Postsecondary Education Commission on Educational Equity* (June 1995)